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Defense Is: Gaters

Felt CIA Involved

By JEFFREY ANTEVIL

Washington, Nov. 15 (News Bureau)—Opposing lawyers clashed repeatedly at the Watergate coverup trial today as attorneys for defendants H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman argued that their clients believed an FBI investigation of the break-in at Democratic headquarters in 1972 could compromise secret Central Intelligence Agency operations.

The arguments were the first indication that a major part of Haldeman's defense would rest on a claim that the effort to block the FBI investigation after the burglary on June 17, 1972, was not simply an attempt to cover up the Watergate affair.

Link to Committee

Associate Special Prosecutor James F. Neal scoffed at the argument by Haldeman's lawyers. He said it was "pristine clear" from the tape of a conversation between Haldeman and President Nixon on June 23, 1972, "that they weren't concerned about (jeopardizing) a CIA asset, they were concerned about Nixon campaign checks which had been 'laundered' through Mexican banks and which could link the Watergate burglars to the President's reelection committee."

The dispute was carried on before Judge J. Sirica with the jury out of the room after Neal objected to defense cross-examination of CIA Deputy Director Vernon A. Walters. Neal charged that the questioning about the extent of CIA activities in Mexico was irrelevant unless Haldeman's attorneys were prepared to prove that Haldeman knew of some CIA operation in Mexico which might be uncovered by the FBI.

Defense lawyers replied that all they needed to show was that

Haldeman "had a reasonable suspicion about this" on June 23, 1972, when he ordered Walters to tell the FBI to stop its investigation in Mexico.

Although he called Haldeman's contention "utter foolishness," Neal conceded that Ehrlichman's claim that he believed there were legitimate CIA interests involved was "not irrational." Neal noted that Ehrlichman did not participate in the conversation at which Haldeman and Nixon discussed using the CIA to block the FBI.

Attorneys for Haldeman, Ehrlichman, John N. Mitchell and two other defendants were expected to begin presenting their cases to the jury late next week. Neal told Sirica today that the government planned to complete its case next Wednesday or Thursday.

"Assets" in Mexico

Defense attorneys told Sirica that they had no intention of charging that the CIA actually participated in the break-in and bugging at Democratic headquarters. But, they said, the CIA did, in fact, have "assets" in Mexico that could have been "compromised." They said that Haldeman was aware of this in June 1972.

Sirica blocked, for the present, a defense effort to introduce a secret memorandum written by then CIA Director Richard M. Helms on June 28, 1972, which appeared to support the contention that the agency was genuinely concerned about the FBI investigation in Mexico. But the judge has indicated that Helms would be summoned back from Iran, where he is now serving as U.S. ambassador, and questioned about the memo during the trial.